

Interview With European TV NOS May 5, 2005

President's Upcoming Visit to the Netherlands

Q. Mr. President, thank you very much for giving us the opportunity to talk to you. You're going to Europe, commemorating 60 years of liberation in Europe. You could have gone to many countries. Why did you choose to go to Holland?

The President. First of all, Holland was a stalwart, and the people of Holland were brave and courageous when it came to resisting tyranny. And a lot of people paid a heavy price for standing for freedom in the face of fascism. As well many Americans lost their lives on Dutch soil, and it's an opportunity to praise those who fought, honor those who died, and remind people that there's more work to be done to make the world more free.

Democracy in the Middle East/War on Terror

Q. About that, more work to be done, do you see any similarities about what happened 60 years ago, the Americans, among others, liberating Europe, and what you are doing now, in the Middle East, for example?

The President. Well, it's a different situation, but there is evil in the world. There's always been evil. I believe that those who kill in the name of a great religion are evil people; people who are willing to destroy innocent life or bury people in mass graves or starve people to death are evil. And I think the free world must confront evil. The last choice is to use the military. On the other hand, sometimes you have to.

And as you know, I made a difficult decision. Some in Europe didn't agree. Some in Holland didn't agree, and I can understand that. But now we have an obligation and a duty, it seems like to me, to work together to help others become free. Free-

dom is universal—freedom shouldn't be just—people shouldn't view freedom as only the purview of Americans or the Dutch or Europeans. Everybody deserves to be free.

President's Leadership and Decisionmaking

Q. But the interesting thing is, Mr. President, that we all agree, also in Europe, about your goals, democracy, freedom—

The President. Sure.

Q. —safety in the world. Does it frustrate you sometimes that—for example, in the Netherlands they did a poll before you are coming now that a vast part of the population does not agree with the way you're handling world affairs, for example.

The President. Well, you know—

Q. Is it frustrating?

The President. No, it doesn't. I mean, I—

Q. It must be a little, though.

The President. No, it doesn't; it doesn't frustrate me. I make decisions on what I think is right. That's what leaders do. The other day in a press conference, I was asked about polls here in America. I said, "A leader who tries to lead based upon polls is like a dog chasing his tail." That's not how you lead. No, I feel comfortable with the decisions I've made.

Q. Is it maybe, then, a communication problem?

The President. I don't know. I don't follow the Dutch media, don't know what's being said in Holland.

Abu Ghraib/Cooperation in Iraq

Q. Well, when people are being asked about you or America, they admire, again, your goals, but when you talk about, for example, about the war on terror and you see freedom and democracy, the Dutch see that as well, but they also see, for example, prisoner abuse in Abu Ghraib prison or

Guantanamo Bay, where prisoners are being held without charge, or the Americans who do not want their soldiers in The Hague for the tribunal, to be accountable.

The President. Well, we have different—

Q. So they see that problem.

The President. Well, first of all, all Americans, including me, reject Abu Ghraib. That was an aberration. That's not what America stands for. And if people are concerned about the tactics, I understand that, but the goal is peace. And now is the time to work together to achieve peace.

Q. How do you want to do that? What do you want to tell the Dutch people?

The President. Let me finish. But you asked me, do I worry about polls? I don't; that's not what leaders do. Leaders who sit around and read polls all the time are leaders that don't lead.

Q. But the Dutch people are interested in—

The President. Let me finish, please. And I have an obligation to lead. And we're making progress. You saw 8½ million people voted in Iraq. They defied the terrorists. They defied the suicide bombers, because they desire to be free. And now we have an obligation to work to help that country develop into a democracy, because the lesson of Europe, of working together as democracies, has yielded peace.

You know, 60 years ago, people would sit around and wonder whether or not peace was possible. And as a result of the good work of many in Holland and around Europe and the United States working collaborative, the world is a peaceful place. And that's what we have a chance to do today. And that's why I thank the Dutch Government for helping train Iraqis, for example, helping Iraq become stable. And it's in our long-term interest that that happen.

Democracy in the Netherlands/Culture of Life

Q. One last question about something completely different.

The President. Sure.

Q. You're the President in the United States known for coming up for moral values, moral issues, also—Terri Schiavo, for example. The Dutch Government is completely on the other side of the spectrum when it comes to abortion or euthanasia, gay marriages, drugs even. Politicians from your party weren't even—Americans don't go—don't want to go to the direction of Holland. Do you share that concern?

The President. No, I—first of all, Holland is a free country. It's a country where the people get to decide the policy. The Government just reflects the will of the people. That's what democracies are all about. And that's what—that's why we should continue to work for common interest to support government of the people, not government that dictates to people. And so, if that's what the people of Holland want, that's what the Government should reflect.

Q. No special message from the President of America?

The President. No. I mean, people are allowed to make—I have a different view, and many Americans have a different view. I've always worked to promote a culture of life. I think that a civil society is one that protects the most vulnerable among us.

But you asked me whether or not I have a message for the people of Holland. The message is: Keep free, be free, support democracy and liberty, not only within your country but continue to work with free nations to help people be free around the world, and the world will be a more peaceful place.

Europe-U.S. Relations/International Criminal Court

Q. One final question, if I may, please.
The President. Sure, sure.

Q. I think maybe Europeans feel that you're also their President, but they do not get to vote for you. How do you feel that responsibility?

The President. I really—I appreciate that. I'm perplexed by that attitude, because Europeans have got very good leaders.

Q. But your decisions influence our lives.

The President. Well, sometimes they do, and sometimes European decisions influence American lives. But the best way to influence the world is to work together in a collaborative spirit. And I appreciate the leadership in the Netherlands. I get along very well with the leadership, and I am—my pledge is to continue to work as closely as we possibly can.

Listen, there's going to be differences of opinion. You mentioned the International Criminal Court. We're not going to join it, and there's a reason why we're not going to join it: We don't want our soldiers being brought up in front of unelected judges. But that doesn't mean

that we're not going to hold people to account, which we're doing now in America. And—nor does it mean that even though we may disagree on the Court, that we can't work for other big goals in the world.

And so, again, on my second trip to Europe since I've been the President, I'm going to continue to emphasize my desire to work with others to achieve peace.

Q. Okay, Mr. President.

The President. Welcome.

Q. Thank you again.

The President. Yes. Thanks for coming.

Q. And enjoy your stay in the Netherlands.

The President. I'm looking forward to it.

NOTE: The interview was taped at 9:48 a.m. in the Map Room at the White House for later broadcast.

Interview With European Print Journalists May 5, 2005

The President. I'm looking forward to this trip, second trip to Europe since my second Inauguration, second time to the Baltics since I've been President. I've been to Russia a lot of times, first time to Georgia in my life and first time to the Netherlands in my life. And I'm looking forward to the experience.

I'm going to celebrate with others the end of World War II. It's a chance to give thanks to those who sacrificed. It is a moment to understand that with each generation comes responsibilities to work to achieve peace. It will be a solemn occasion in the graveyard, but one in which I will be able to express our appreciation to the Dutch for her friendship and remind the world that we still have great duties. And one of the greatest duties of all is to spread freedom to achieve the peace.

I look forward to going to the Baltics again. When the Baltics first got into

NATO, I remember commenting to somebody sitting close to me, I said, "This is going to be a fantastic addition to NATO, because countries that have been—that really appreciate freedom are now amidst a great Alliance, reinvigorating the concept of why we exist in the first place, to defend freedom."

And I look forward to seeing the leaders from the free countries. I look forward to my speech in Latvia, which talks about democracy and the spread of democracy. But also with democracy has got certain obligations, rule of law, transparency, and the protection of minority rights—protection of minorities, upholding minority rights.

I'm looking forward to going to Russia. I'll have a private dinner with President Putin. It will be a part of an ongoing dialog I have with him as we learn to continue